

⑫ **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

⑲ Application number: **85200463.9**
⑳ Date of filing: **27.03.85**

⑤① Int. Cl.4: **B 01 D 13/04**

④③ Date of publication of application: **01.10.86**
Bulletin 86/40

⑦① Applicant: **Taga, Jun, 1-10, Minami Ikuta 7-chome**
Tama-ku, Kawasaki-shi Kanagawa-ken (JP)

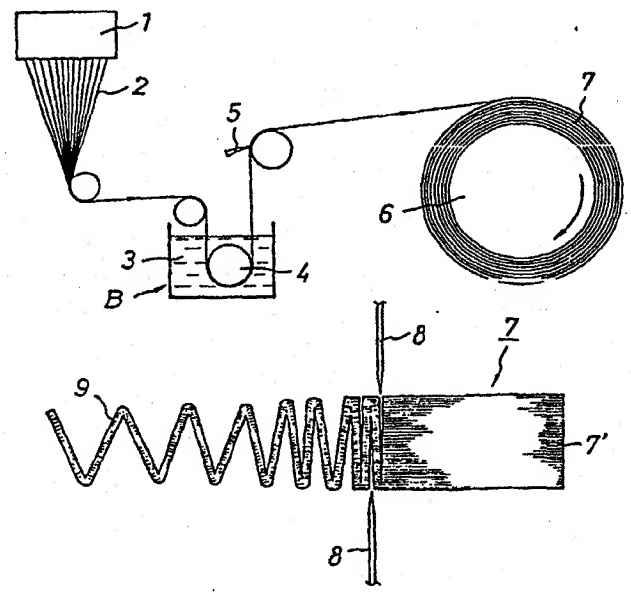
⑦② Inventor: **Taga, Jun, 1-10, Minami Ikuta 7-chome**
Tama-ku, Kawasaki-shi Kanagawa-ken (JP)

⑥④ Designated Contracting States: **CH DE FR GB IT LI NL**

⑦④ Representative: **Noz, Franciscus Xaverius, Ir. et al,**
Boschdijk 155 P.O. Box 645, NL-5600 AP Eindhoven (NL)

⑤④ **Porous membranes and processes for producing the porous membranes.**

⑤⑦ A desired number of individual hollow fibers (2) are integrally united and bound in parallel with respective fiber axis, thereby producing a bound multifiber material (7) having a certain thickness. Subsequently, the bound multifiber material is sliced vertically relative to the respective fiber axis by a desired slice means (8), thereby a porous membrane having ultramicropores can be produced.



EP 0 195 860 A1

- 1 -

Porous membranes and processes for producing the
porous membranes

This invention relates to porous membranes and processes for producing the porous membranes.

The porous membranes are used in many industrial
5 fields, out of which there are porous membrane filters as superficial filtering material.

In general, there are three methods for producing the porous membrane filters.

10

One is a radiation method, by means of which a membrane filter is provided with straight pores. The product's name "NUCLEPORE" of Nuclepore Corporation, U.S.A. is manufactured by the
15 radiation method.

20

Secondly, there is a method for making pores by vaporizing a solvent with a cast membrane of a high-molecular substance soluble with the solvent.

Thirdly, there is a method for using slits generated when stretching linear high-molecular membrane.

The first radiation method is superior in making uniform a pore diameter, and its permeating flow flux is large, but susceptible to cause clogging in view of membrane's material and thickness.

5

The second method for making use of casting the solvent has the inconveniences that each pore is not uniform in diameter, lengthy or zig-zag type and its permeating flow flux is small.

10

The third stretching method has the disadvantage that the area of each slit is diversified and not uniform.

15

Generally speaking, a precision membrane filter must satisfy the following requirements: 1) high filtering accuracy, 2) high mechanical strength, 3) less dissolution, 4) high chemical resistance, 5) high thermal resistance, 6) large permeating flow flux, 7) inactive biochemically, 8) low cost, 9) long filtering cycle and 10) recycling.

20

However, any of the conventional membrane filters has advantages as well as disadvantages.

25

It is a general object of this invention to provide porous membranes and processes for producing various kinds of porous membranes that can conform to respective use purposes.

30

According to one aspect of this invention, a desired number of individual hollow fibers are integrally united and bound in parallel with respective fiber axis, thereby producing a bound multifiber material having a certain thickness. Subsequently, the bound multifiber material is

35

sliced vertically relative to the respective fiber axis by a desired slice means, thereby a porous membrane can be produced.

- 5 According to another aspect of this invention, it is possible to produce a porous membrane having ultramicro-pores by using individual Sea-Islands type multifibers in which a large number of Islands (strands) are distributed in
10 the Sea (binder).

Likewise, a desired number of Sea-Islands type multifibers are integrally united and bound in parallel with respective fiber axis, thereby
15 producing a bound multifiber material. Subsequently, the bound multifiber material is sliced vertically relative to the respective fiber axis by a desired slice means.

- 20 Next to this, the Islands in the thus sliced material are removed by an etching treatment, and perforated partially or wholly, thereby a porous membrane having ultramicro-pores can be produced.

25 This invention will be further described, by way of examples, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which: -

- 30 Fig. 1 is a schematic view of process for producing a porous membrane according to this invention, in which a plurality of hollow fibers

- 4 -

are fed into a binder storing bath and wound up by a drum;

Fig. 2 is a front view of a trapezoidal material
5 flattened after having cut off the cylindrical material in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a pleat-type material which is sliced reciprocally by knives, thereby a large number of
10 porous membranes can be produced in a corrugated form;

Fig. 4 is a front view of a flattened and elongated porous material which has been produced
15 by dividing the material in Fig. 2 into a number of segments through cutting, and bonding those segments with each other;

Fig. 5 is a schematic view of a process for
20 producing a cylindrical porous material by dividing the material in Fig. 4 into a number of trapezoidal segments and bonding those segments with each other;

25 Fig. 6 is a partially expanded perspective view of a porous membrane produced by the aforesaid steps according to this invention;

Fig. 7 is a section view of a multistrand
30 porous membrane according to this invention;

Fig. 8 is a section view of another example of

- 5 -

the multistrand porous membrane.

Fig. 9 is a schematic view of an etching process of the multistrand porous membrane;

5

Fig. 10 is a view of the multistrand porous membrane of which each pore is produced in a tapered form.

- 10 Preferred examples of this invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Referring first to Fig. 1, numeral 1 is a die for
15 feeding a plurality of hollow fibers 2 made of polyethylene terephthalate (hereinafter called "PETP"). Each hollow fiber 2 has a pore 2' formed longitudinally (partially illustrated in Fig. 6).

20

Numeral 3 is an urethane elastomer liquid as a binder which is stored in a bath B. Numeral 4 is a guide roll for guiding the plurality of hollow fiber 2. Numeral 5 is a doctor knife or
25 brush for removing an excessive liquid. Numeral 6 is a drum for winding a material 7 according to this invention, in which the plurality of hollow fibers 2 have been bound in the bath B.

- 30 Fig. 1, of course, includes the cooling, withdrawing, stretching, thermal setting and other means in a normal spinning process, but

- 6 -

their mechanism is omitted.

The hollow fibers 2 extruded from the die 1 are guided by the guide roll 4 which is disposed within the urethane elastomer liquid bath B containing a preferred hardening agent, and soaked by the urethane elastomer liquid 3. An excessive liquid on the hollow fibers 2 are removed by the doctor knife 5 and the hollow fibers 2 are wound up regularly by the drum 6. The surface of the drum 6 is coated by an inactive substance such as e.g. polyolefin, fluorinated resin or the like, so that the binder 3 cannot be adhered to the surface of the drum 6. When winding up the hollow fibers 2, any bubble cannot be contained in the binder 3, so that the hollow fibers 2 must be fed regularly in a traverse direction. It is optional to dispose the drum 6 within the binder 3. Thus, there is obtained a material 7 having a substantial thickness and wound up cylindrically.

The material 7 is hardened or semihardened by a hardening agent contained in the binder 3 to the degree that it can be drawn up, and then cut off in order to provide the material 7 with a number of slits. In that case, if necessary, it is optional to heat it and expedite its hardening.

Hardening by the binder must be controlled accurately. It is demanded to pay a particular attention to a reactive heat at the hardening

- 7 -

time.

This means that heat will not raise more than the softening temperature of the hollow fibers 2.

5 The hollow fibers 2 bound one after another show a move of shrinkage in the range of the softening temperature after thermal setting. Particularly, since a larger shrinkage force is concentrated around a center of the cylindrical material 7,

10 high attention should be paid so that each pore of the hollow fibers 2 cannot be collapsed.

Fig. 2 is a front view of a trapezoidal material 7 flattened after having cut off the cylindrical

15 material in Fig. 1. It may be heated and softened in order to convert into a flattened material.

As shown in Fig. 2, a plurality of strands 7' are disposed horizontally one after another and indicated by thin lines. The trapezoidal flattened material 7 is cut off at both ends. It will be useful to adhere a cut segment s to the other end in order to avoid waste.

25

Fig. 3 shows a front view of a pleat-type material 7, in which it is sliced reciprocally from the upper side and lower side respectively by an upper knife 8 and a lower knife 8' while

30 leaving an end of the material 7, and provided with a number of notches. Thus, by extending such material 7 provided with a number of notches,

- 8 -

it becomes a pleat-type porous material 9 according to this invention.

5 Numeral 2 is one of a large number of pores formed in the pleat-type porous material 7. It is useful to dispose a skin layer (not illustrated) on both upper and lower surfaces of the material 7 in order to reinforce the strength of the both upper and lower surfaces
10 of the material. The skin layer may be made of a preferred resin. The pleat-type porous material 7 is very useful for incorporating it in a cartridge.

15 In general, when folding a porous membrane filter in a pleat form, a bottom portion of V-shape is provided with shortened pores, while a top portion thereof is provided with enlarged pores. However, according to the example in
20 Fig. 2, any diametrical unbalance of pores does not take place, because the pleat-type membrane is sliced by a knife. Accordingly, the folded porous material 7 in Fig. 2 maintains uniform pore diameter.

25 Further, it is optional to dispose at least one semispherical concave portion (not illustrated) on the upper and lower surfaces of the drum 6, thereby two semispherical
30 materials consisting of the hollow fibers 2 can be obtained. By bonding the two semispherical materials, the cylindrical material in Fig. 1

- 9 -

can be produced.

Fig. 4 is a view of a flattened and elongated porous material 11 according to this invention.

5 Referring to a method for making the material 11, the flattened material 7 as shown in Fig. 2 is divided into a number of segments a through cutting as shown by a number of vertical dotted lines 10 - 10' and those segments s are jointed
10 with each other so that numerous strands can be disposed vertically. Thus, the flattened material 11 can be obtained.

Numeral 7" as shown by a real line indicates
15 either one of the top and bottom surfaces of the material 7 in Fig. 2.

Subsequently, the material 11 is cut off in a trapezoidal form as shown by a number of dotted
20 lines 12 - 12'.

Fig. 5 is a side view of a cylindrical material 13 having a certain thickness, in which a number of cut-off trapezoidal segments are jointed with
25 each other. Numeral 12" is a bonding surface. The numerous strands are disposed in a radial direction. Next to this, the side surface of the cylindrical material 13 is exfoliated continuously by a knife 14 of a slicer (not
30 illustrated), thereby a porous membrane 15 is formed and wound up by a drum 16. When jointing a number of segments cut off in a trapezoidal

- 10 -

form, the strands exposed on a cut surface of each segment are dissolved by a solvent, and a binding area of adjacent segments is widened, thereby a strong adhesion is obtained.

5

Fig. 6 is a partially expanded perspective view of the porous materials 7 and 13 which have been sliced or exfoliated as shown in Figs. 3 and 5. In Fig. 6, the hollow fiber 2 as a strand
10 (hereinafter may be called "Island") has a pore 2' and a plurality of hollow fibers 2 are bound each other by the binder 3 (hereinafter may be called "Sea").

15 It is of course optional to use as a material an ordinary bundle of hollow fibers in a roving or two form. The hollow fiber 2 as a single strand has 1.5 denier in thickness (about 12.5 μ in outer diameter) and about 2.5 μ in pore diameter. For
20 example, the hollow fiber "ESTEROLLA" produced by a Japanese corporation Toyobo Co., Ltd. has the aforesaid specification. It is very difficult to use the hollow fiber of less than
25 1.5 denier in thickness, because it is susceptible to be cut at the spinning process.

If it is demanded to use a membrane filter having a more minute pore diameter, it is desirable to use e.g. a porous material having
30 over 6 pores. Figs. 7 and 8 are section views of such porous material, in which numeral 17 is a composite multistrand material made of a

- 11 -

preferred polymer and numeral 17' is a pore.

Referring to a process for manufacturing the porous material 17, a desired polymer is fused
5 directly below a nozzle and solidified while containing outer air. In this case, the porous material is produced as one film, so that it is uneasy to cut it.

10 Further, the porous material 17 comprises a plurality of pores adjacent each other, so that the number of pores is increased and the rate of permeability is enhanced, thereby a mechanical strength of the membrane as well as its
15 productivity is increased. It will be also very useful to dispose a skin layer (not illustrated) on the outermost surface of the porous material 17 in order to enhance a good adhesion to the binder.

20 Further, when either one of the Sea and Islands or both the Sea and Islands are made of any incompatible or inadhesive substance such as non-polar polyolefin, silicone or fluorinated
25 resin, preferably both the Sea and Islands are made of compatible ionomer resin or the like.

Now, an example of using a composite multifiber disclosed in Japanese Examined Patent
30 Publications 44-18369 and 48-22126 will be described.

- 12 -

The composite multifiber has 3 denier (about 18 $\mu\phi$), in which the Sea (as binder) is made of nylon 6 and the Islands consist of about 80 PETP-made strands. Each strand has 0.015 denier
5 about 1 $\mu\phi$.

Now, an example of using a composite multifiber having about 80 strands made of polystyrene easy for etching and the aforesaid same
10 specification will be referred to hereinafter. After having sliced such composite multifiber in accordance with the process in Figs. 3 or 5, the strands i.e. Islands were dissolved and
15 wiped away by the etching process in Fig. 9, thereby ultramicro-pores have been produced. This technique is claimed in Claim 2 in the last part of this specification.

Referring to Fig. 9, numeral 15' is a matrix
20 prior to the porous material. The matrix 15' is guided by a drum 19 disposed in an etching bath 18. Numeral 20 is a liquid for etching. Numeral 21 is a guide roll, and numeral 22 is a reel for winding up the porous membrane
25 according to this invention. This etching process is the same as that of a membrane filter of the product "NUCLEPORE", for which the radiation method is applied.

30 The matrix 15' is introduced to the etching bath 18 and the polystyrene Islands are dissolved

- 13 -

by the solvent 20 such as e.g. benzene and converted into the porous membrane.

The solvent stuck to the porous membrane is
5 wiped away, cleaned and dried by a known process.

In order to produce more minute pores, it is also possible to use a multistrand material, in which the Islands are made of a different
10 member other than the high polymer substance as described above. The member is liquid or solid at a normal temperature, and must be fused or liquefied at a spinning temperature. Further, it is incompatible with the Sea, low
15 viscosity at a processing temperature, involatile, easy, for etching and innocuous. For example, it may be polyethylene glycol, high-grade alcohol ester, hydrocarbon oil, silicone oil, low-melting point metal or alloy, glass or the like.

20 Preferably, a multistrand material having a large number of Islands is suitable for practicing the process of this invention. Namely, the Islands i.e. strands are removed by the
25 etching process according to this invention, thereby the remained pores are utilized as a porous membrane. Accordingly, it will be optional to use a multistrand material having several thousand or several ten thousands
30 Islands..

To enhance the value of the porous membrane

- 14 -

according to this invention, it is possible to transform each pore into an unsymmetrical form, i.e. tapered or funnel-shaped form. Such unsymmetrical pores have the advantage of enhancing permeability, prolonging a life span largely and recycling it by washing. Such unsymmetrical pores can be produced by the following process. For example, the Sea is made of nylon 6, while the Islands are hollow fibers made of nylon 6, while the Islands are hollow fibers made of PETP. After having sliced a porous material in accordance with the process in Fig. 3 or Fig. 5, it is introduced into the etching bath 18. The etching bath 18 is, at its bottom, provided with a heat-exchanger 23 for heating purposes.

The solvent 20 which is a heated alkali liquid NaOH can be controlled accurately. Further, the drum 19 is also provided with a heat exchanger (not illustrated) so that a surface temperature of the drum 19 may be controlled accurately.

The thus formed porous membrane is now soaked in the etching bath 18 having the liquid temperature 80°C (not always limited), and then the PETP-made Islands are dissolved. When carrying out a dissolving process while bonding one surface of the drum (less than 20°C at its surface temperature) with the porous membrane, there takes place a clear temperature difference between the drum roller side and the

- 15 -

liquid side. Since the dissolving effect is different, the pore diameter at the liquid side becomes larger than that at the roller side, thereby each pore becomes tapered.

5

Referring to Fig. 10, numeral 24 is a sealing member for sealing one surface of the porous member 15'. The sealing member 24 is not dissolved by an etching liquid, but must be eliminated easily. By sealing one surface of the porous membrane 15' by means of a roller coating or a printing technique, a number of funnel-shaped pores 2" are formed in order to prevent the etching liquid from penetrating into the pores 2". Preferably, the sealing member 24 is starch, water-soluble resin or the like that can be removed by an ordinary solvent such as e.g. a cellulose lacquer.

20 To protect each void of the funnel-shaped pores 2" from the penetration of the etching liquid 20 thereinto, it is desirable to preheat the porous membrane 15' more than the temperature of the etching liquid 20 so that the temperature of the porous membrane 15' can be decreased in the etching liquid 20. Thus, the etching liquid 20 is penetrated into the pores 2" through absorption. Further, by adjusting the position of the drum 19 disposed in the etching bath 18, it is possible to penetrate the etching liquid into the pores 2".

- 16 -

Now, a process for producing a porous membrane having ultra-micro pores will be described. It can be produced by preparing the Islands made of foamable fiber. In general, as the volume of
5 a foamable material becomes larger, a void at its center grows larger. Accordingly, the volume of it must be small, thereby air-cell becomes small.

10 For example, a foamable fiber or multifiber in which each strand is no more than 1 mm in diameter may be converted into a porous membrane in accordance with the process in Fig. 3 or 5.

15 The pores produced by using the foaming effect of the foamable fiber are stretched uniformly in a longitudinal direction by a spinning process, thereby a large number of super minute pores can be obtained. The porous membrane having
20 super minute pores produced by foamed fibers can be treated by the same etching process, thereby the unsymmetrical pores can be produced.

Thus, it is possible to use various kinds of
25 materials in order to practice the process according to this invention.

The etching process according to this invention can be applied repeatedly including a washing
30 treatement. When using a composite multistrand material, desirably the Sea is first of all treated by the etching treatment. In this case,

the Islands perform the function of sealing material, thereby the tapered pores can be produced easily.

- 5 The binder according to this invention is preferably urethane elastomer, silicone resin, polyvinyl chloride, plastisol, organosol, reactive acrylic resin, liquid nylon, epoxy resin, glass, metal or the like. And, it must
10 be hardened or gelled at a lower temperature than the melting temperature of the Islands.

Preferably, the binder does not contain a volatile solvent, but it is optional to dissolve
15 the surface of the Island by a preferred solvent and bond adjacent Islands with each other. In that case, a remaining solvent is vaporized by drying and the shape of each Island is most preferably a right triangle at section.

- 20 When producing a porous membrane having thermal resistance, in which the Islands are made of carbon, glass, metal or the like, the binder may be sintered or fused. In this case, the
25 binder in an emulsion paste or powder form is coated on the surface of the Islands as fibers. As shown in Fig. 2, the material is formed in a flattened plate form, and any volatile substance remaining therein may be dried by
30 heating or vacuum process, so taht any air-cell may not remain in the binder. For example, the following combination of the Islands vs. the

- 18 -

Sea will be suitable: carbon fiber: 4-ethylene fluoride, glass fiber: 4-ethylene fluoride, high-melting point glass fiber: low-melting point glass, glass fiber or carbon fiber: lead.

- 5 In the case a density difference between the Islands and the Sea is larger, the aforesaid process may be under no gravity or by using a centrifugal force.
- 10 Referring to a method using a centrifugal force, the Islands are wound up on a cylindrical cage as shown in Fig. 1 and it is disposed in a space of a rotary drum for centrifugal casting. Rotating the rotary drum high-speedily, a melted glass,
- 15 metal or the like as the binder is supplied into the space of the rotary drum so that the cylindrical cage can sink in the binder. Thus, any air existing between the Islands is discharged due to a density difference between the Islands
- 20 and the Sea, thereby a hybrid porous material in which the Islands and the Sea are tightly bonded together.

- 25 Such hybrid porous material can be converted into a porous membrane by the slice process in Fig. 3. It is possible to produce a membrane filter having excellent thermal resistance as well as anticorrosion by plating it with gold, platinum or the like. In this case, the
- 30 diameter of each pore may be reduced.

In the case the hollow fibers according to this

- 19 -

invention are made of a high polymer substance, of course they are used as a material for producing a porous membrane, but not as a spinning material. From this point of view, a

5 high smoothing degree of the surface of the hollow fibers is demanded very much, but its strength is not always necessary. The ordinary hollow fibers are drafted, stretched and heat-set, and their strength is increased by crystallization.

10 However, there is growing the danger that may longitudinal cracks or pilling may occur frequently. Due to such phenomena, passing fluid into the pores is confronted with larger resistance, and some cake may be adhered to the

15 porous membrane. Accordingly, its filtering efficiency is decreased. To eliminate such disadvantages, it is desirable to enlarge the drafting rate of the strands - Islands, make the stretching rate smaller and smoothen the

20 surface of the strands as much as possible. It is accordingly demanded to cool them slower rather than a rapid cooling right below the nozzle. A normal heat-setting is suitable. However, after having sliced the porous membrane,

25 it is optional to heat or heat-set it again. Namely, by making use of the crosslinking to strengthen adhesion between the Islands and the Sea as well as the pore enlarging mechanism by shrinking, the pore diameter may be enlarged or

30 shortened due to shrinking of the Islands and resilience of the Sea. That is, as the resilience of the Sea is stronger than that of

- 20 -

the Islands, the pore diameter is shortened. On the contrary, as the former is weaker than the latter, the pore diameter is enlarged. However, in any case, a stress to enlarge the
5 outer diameter of the Island is caused, thereby adhesion of the Islands to the Sea becomes tight and strong.

10 If either one of the Islands and the Sea or both the Islands and the Sea are nonpolar and difficult for adhesion, it is more advisable to roughen the surface of the Islands, thereby the Islands are retainable in the Sea.

15 Further, in the case that no suitable adhesion of the Islands to the Sea may be obtained in view of insufficiency of expansion coefficient, crystalline shrinking ratio, surface tension or the like, the Islands may be taken out from
20 the Sea, thereby the pores will be formed. However, such phenomenon is advantageous for this invention, because it is to utilize positively such pores to form a large number of pores in the porous membrane. According to
25 this invention, the Islands are removed by suction, vibration biaxial orientation or the like.

30 Further, when strengthening a suitable bonding between the Islands and the Sea, preferably the binder may be made of alloy containing antimony (or stibium), so that its volume can be expanded

- 21 -

at the hardening time. Further, if the Islands are made of metal, the metal may be replaced with alloy having excellent solderability.

5 Further, when producing a porous membrane filter having pores in which the Islands are made of incompatible liquid, it will be very useful to produce a polymer-blend fiber by blending the incompatible liquid with a desired polymer, and
10 use it as a material. The incompatible liquid is communicated with the Sea in the form of super minute strands.

After this material becomes a membrane, the
15 Islands are dissolved or removed by the etching process. For example, a combination of the Sea made of PETP with the Islands made of polyethylene glycol of which polymerization degree: 20,000 will be suitable for producing
20 such porous membrane.

Further, a porous membrane disclosed in Japanese Examined Patent Publication 46-25267 and Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication 49-118761 will be
25 referred to. The porous membrane was made of polytetrafluoroethylene, and its material was blended with a high-boiling point lubricant. After having extruded such material in a spinning form, it is wound up as shown in Fig. 1 and
30 converted into a matrix. After that, the lubricant is removed in a hot-air furnace, thereby a porous membrane can be produced.

- 22 -

The Islands produced by the aforesaid polymer-blend process is an aggregate of super minute fiber form. The thickness of each Island may be controlled accurately by adjusting the liquid
5 quantity, mixing degree and spinning draft ratio.

As previously described in the background of the invention, the method for making use of casting
10 the solvent has the inconvenience that each pore is not uniform in diameter and shape. To overcome such inconvenience, a solution is mixed with a thickening agent and a filler, thereby viscosity is controlled so that spinning,
15 winding and slicing may be carried out. After a flattened material is produced, it is swelled slowly by adding a preferred solvent. After that, the solvent is vaporized by the conventional method, thereby a precision porous membrane can
20 be produced. Each pore is formed uniformly at a right angle relative to the membrane surface and provided with a straight and short inner circumstance.

25 The porous membrane of this invention is applied not only for a membrane filter, but also for a waterproof hygroscopic clothing. The diameter of raindrop or mist is about 100 to 2,000 μ , so that the pore diameter 3 μ to 5 μ of a waterproof
30 clothing is quite suitable. Since the porous membrane of this invention has a uniform pore distribution, it may be applied for such

- 23 -

waterproof clothing.

To prevent moisture of the waterproof clothing,
it must have the function of water absorption as
5 well as moisture absorption. To satisfy this
function, it is possible to produce a waterproof
and hygroscopic material by using a soft urethane
elastomer as the binder and mixing hollow fibers,
water absorptive fibers and hygroscopic fibers
10 all together as the Islands.

Further, it is also possible to produce a
desired porous membrane by using the fibers
having antistatic, conductive, repellent or
15 magnetic properties.

Further, it is one's option to change the porous
membrane into a plate type material having a
certain thickness.

20 The fibers to be used in this invention are
mainly long fibers, but may be short ones. The
short fibers may be used as sliver or roving.
It will also be useful to slice a cylindrical
25 material produced by a method for lining up the
short fibers disclosed in Japanese Patent
Application Ser.No. 59-2883 (filed January 11th,
1984). In that case, the coating, process of the
binder may be carried out in vacuum so that any
30 air-cell may not remain between adjacent fibers.

As described above, it is possible to produce

- 24 -

various kinds of porous membranes and materials that can conform to respective functions by selecting various materials or by combination thereof.

5

Still further, although a sectional profile of each pore is limited to be circular, it may be such a lengthwise slot that the ratio of a short side vs. a long side is 1 : over 1.5. Such a
10 lengthwise slot is very advantageous for prolonging a filtering cycle.

Although the teachings of this invention have herein been discussed with reference to specific
15 theories and embodiments, it is to be understood that these are by way of illustration only and that others may wish to utilize this invention in different designs or applications.

20 Preferred examples of this invention will be described hereinafter.

EXAMPLE 1

A polyester tubular fiber having 50 μ in outer
25 diameter and 20 μ in inner diameter was used as the Island, while a mixture of 100 weight % of a soluble fluorinated resin, 50 weight % of xylene, 50 weight % of n-butanol 50, 0.25 weight % of P-toluene sulfonic acid as catalyst and 3
30 weight % of methyl melanine as hardening agent was used as the Sea i.e. the binder. While the former being soaked in the latter and the solvent

- 25 -

being vaporized by a hot air of 60°C temperature, the former was wound up by the drum having 80 mm in thickness. The thus obtained cylindrical material was 10 mm in thickness and 100 mm in width. After drying it for two hours in a gear oven of 80°C at temperature, it was hardened at 140°C after 30 minutes passed. As a result, there was produced a pleat-type porous membrane having 0.05 mm at thickness as shown in Fig. 3. It was observed by a microscope having 200 times magnification, and the result was that each pore in the original tubular fiber was of a right circle and disposed regularly.

15 EXAMPLE II

The nylon 6 was used as the Sea, while a polystyrene multifiber having 50 μ in outer diameter was used as the Islands. The latter having 100 strands was spun in advance. The thus formed multifiber was soaked in the polyurethane elastomer liquid as the binder and guided by the drum having 80 mm in outer diameter. As a result, there was produced a cylindrical material having 15 mm in thickness and 100 mm in width. It was exposed for 24 hours at a room temperature and hardened. Subsequently, it was sliced in a pleat-type as shown in Fig. 3. Each sliced segment was 0.05 mm in thickness. The surface of the pleat-type material was partially dissolved in the etching bath storing 4.2 N, HCl liquid, in which the superficial temperature of the guide roller 21

- 26 -

- was 10°C and the liquid temperature in the bath
20 was 10°C. After that, it was washed by
water and dried by a hot air of 80°C at
temperature. After that, the polystyrene
- 5 Islands were dissolved by benzene in another
etching bath and dried by the hot air as
described in Example I. Thus, a porous membrane
was produced. It was observed by a microscope
having 300 times magnification and the result
- 10 was that a large number of tapered pores were
disposed regularly, in which each of smaller
tapered pores was about 2 μ and each of larger
tapered pores was about 5 μ .
- 15 The figures used in the claims are only meant to explain
more clearly the intention of the invention and are not
supposed to be any restriction concerning the interpretation
of the invention.

- 1 -

Claims:

1. A porous membrane characterised in that a
desired number of individual hollow fibers (2)
5 are integrally united and bound in parallel with
respective fiber axis, thereby producing a bound
multifiber material (7) having a certain
thickness, said bound multifiber material being
sliced vertically relative to the respective
10 fiber axis by a desired slice means (5), thereby
a porous membrane being able to be produced.
2. A process for producing a porous membrane
characterised in that a desired number of
15 individual hollow fibers (2) are integrally
united and bound in parallel with respective
fiber axis, thereby producing a bound multifiber
material (7) having a certain thickness, said
bound multifiber material being sliced vertically
20 relative to the respective fiber axis by a
desired slice means (5), thereby a porous membrane
being able to be produced.
3. A porous membrane characterised in that

- 2 -

individual Sea-Islands type multifibers in which a large number of Islands are distributed in the Sea are used to produce said porous membrane having ultramicro-pores and a desired number
5 of Sea-Islands type multifibers are integrally united and bound in parallel with respective fiber axis, thereby producing a bound multifiber material having a certain thickness,
10 said bound multifiber material is sliced vertically relative to the respective fiber axis by a desired slice means, subsequently, the Islands in the thus sliced material being removed by a preferred etching treatment, and perforated
15 partially or wholly, thereby ultramicro-pores being able to be produced.

4. The porous membrane as claimed in claim 3, wherein said Islands are strands and said Sea
20 is a binder.

5. A process for producing a porous membrane characterised in that individual Sea-Islands type multifibers in which a large number of Islands
25 are distributed in the Sea are used to produce said porous membrane having ultramicro-pores and a desired number of Sea-Islands type multifibers are integrally united and bound in parallel with respective fiber axis, thereby producing
30 a bound multifiber material having a certain thickness, said bound multifiber material is sliced vertically relative to the respective fiber axis by a desired slice means, subsequently,

the Islands in the thus sliced material being removed by a preferred etching treatment, and perforated partially or wholly, thereby ultramicro-pores being able to be produced.

5

6. The process for producing a porous membrane as claimed in claim 5, wherein said Islands are strands and said Sea is a binder.

Fig.1

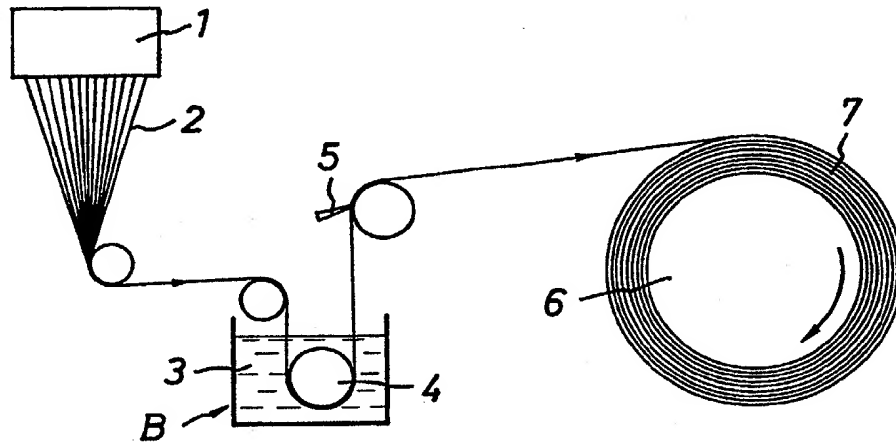


Fig.2

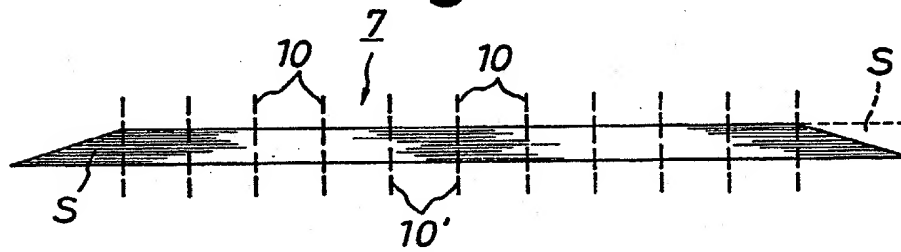


Fig.3

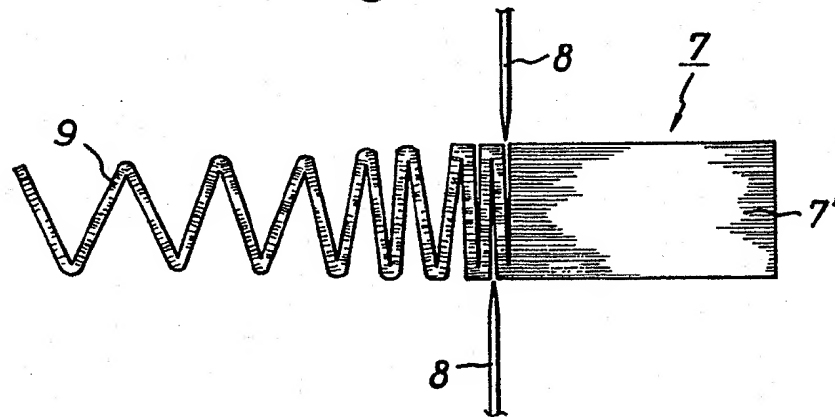


Fig.4

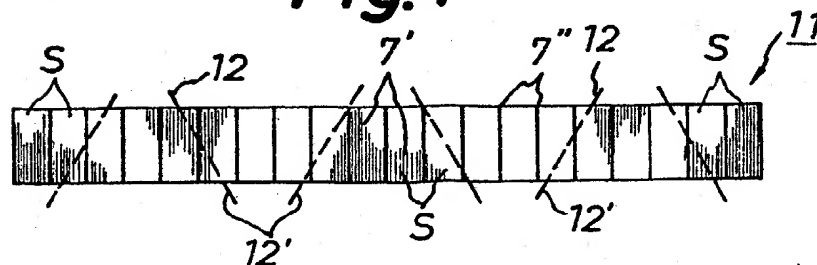


Fig.5

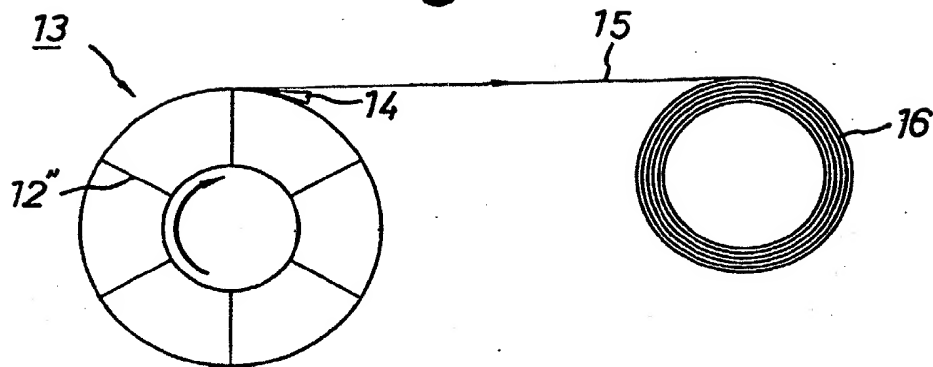


Fig.6

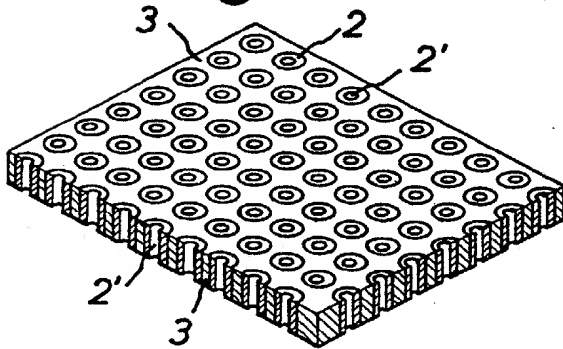


Fig.7

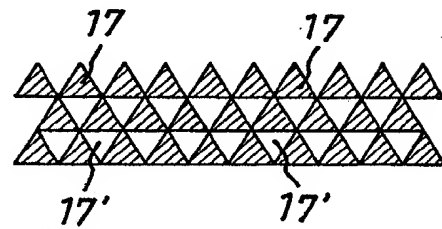


Fig.8

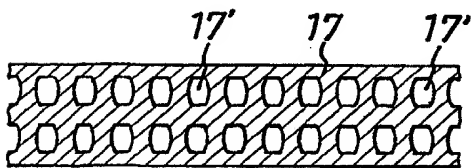


Fig.10

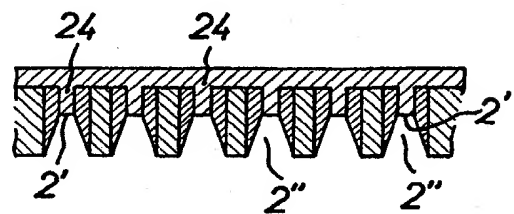
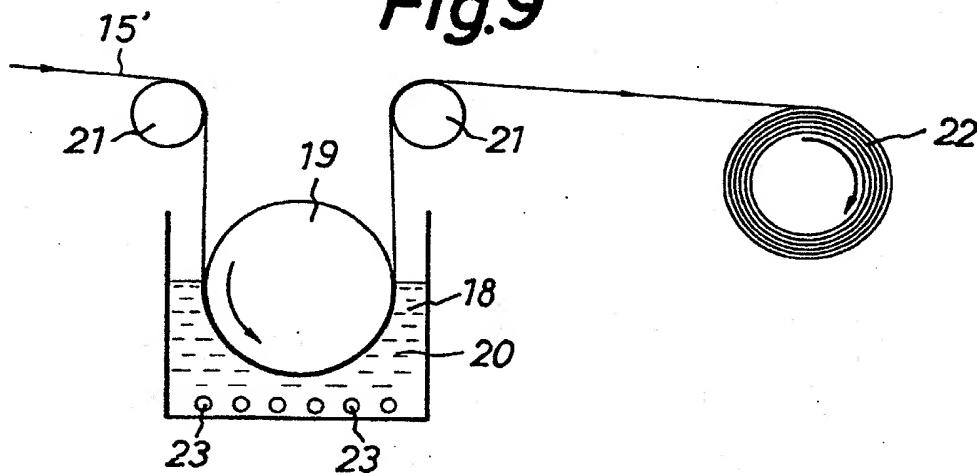


Fig.9





European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

0195860

Application number

EP 85 20 0463

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.4)
X	DE-A-2 915 524 (AKZO) * Claims 1, 11-18; page 21, paragraph 5; figures 1-7, 31 *	1-6	B 01 D 13/04
A	--- US-A-3 234 639 (H.-J. DIETZSCH) * Claim 1, figures 1-4 *	1,2	
A	--- PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN, vol. 8, no. 34, 15th February 1984, page (C-120) (1471); & JP-A-58-197311 (TORAY K.K.) 17-11-1983 -----	1	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.4)
			B 01 D 13/00 B 01 D 13/01 B 01 D 13/04 A 61 M 1/16 C 02 F 1/44
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search BERLIN		Date of completion of the search 28-08-1985	Examiner KUEHN P
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS			
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	